

Forward Institute

“Evidence before Ideology”

March 6, 2014

To Wisconsin State Senate Education Committee Members:

Senator Luther Olsen, Chair

Senator Paul Farrow, Vice Chair

Senator Alberta Darling

Senator Leah Vukmir

Senator Richard Gudex

Senator John Lehman

Senator Timothy Cullen

Senator Nikiya Harris

Senator Kathleen Vinehout

Dear Chairman Olsen and Education Committee Members,

Today, the Senate Education Committee will hold a public hearing pertaining to SB 619, which would create a “model academic standards board” in Wisconsin – shifting responsibility for the creation of academic standards from a non-partisan group of education experts to an assemblage of political appointees. I am writing this letter to voice my opposition to SB 619 in the strongest terms, as this gross politicization and ideology have no place in educating our children.

In Wisconsin and our communities statewide, we invest in public education because it provides a return more valuable than any sum of money. Public education is the only way we can provide EVERY child the opportunity to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to pursue what is meaningful to them; and in turn, live a prosperous and meaningful life.

This is not a partisan issue. We have scores of legitimate, academic research which shows us what that education should include, in order to fulfill the responsibility we have as a community to provide children with the greatest educational knowledge and opportunity. In SB619, this legislature and the authors would abdicate that responsibility to a partisan group of political appointees. In fact, the majority of the members proposed in SB619 would be political appointees. In today’s political climate, this would assure abdication of that responsibility to the political and ideological interests with the greatest financial influence. In any terms, this is an absurd proposal. I find it highly objectionable to cede responsibility of education standards to any political appointee from any party. The future of our state is too important.

I also object to the Committee's consideration of Dr. Duke Pesta as an "expert" in educational standards. With all due respect to Dr. Pesta and his expertise as a Shakespearean scholar, his area of focus and expertise is certainly not educational pedagogy or curriculum. In fact, Dr. Pesta does have a vested interest in the expansion of home schooling (https://www.greathomeschoolconventions.com/wp-content/uploads/sc/speakers/sc_%20speaking_sessions_alphabetical_2014.pdf) and public financing of Christian education curriculum (<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Christmas+myths%3a+in+this+day+and+age%2c+when+something+is+described+as+...-a0313160852>), even to the point of advocating for public resources for expansion of ideological religious positions. Dr. Pesta, in serving in his position as the Freedom Project's Education Director (<http://www.freedomproject.com/>), works for the American Opinion Foundation (<http://www.ibs.org/society-news/american-opinion-foundation-a-progress-report>). As many of you must already know, the AOF is the 501c3 arm of the John Birch Society. The John Birch Society's express mission for education is *"...to provide educational materials...develop and maintain course curriculum for grades K-12 homeschoolers."*

This committee has a constitutional obligation to address the educational needs of our children through the best means of providing them with equal opportunity to pursue what is meaningful through skills and knowledge. That is fundamental to our democracy, and fundamental to our investment in every child's education.

In SB 619, and the consideration of Dr. Pesta's testimony as "expert" on this matter, the Senate Education Committee is abdicating its responsibility to political and religious ideology as reflected in the bill. For these reasons, I urge you to table SB619, and not pass it out of committee.

Respectfully submitted,

Scott Wittkopf

Chair, Forward Institute, Inc.
Scott@forwardinstitutewi.org